MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

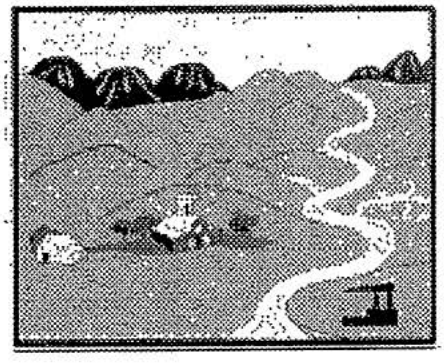
Watersheds

Fact Sheet
8/97

Division of Environmental Quality
Water Pollution Control Program

What is a watershed?

A watershed is a land region draining into a single body of water. A group of watersheds that drain into a major water body is often referred to as a basin. For instance, all of the land that drains into the Missouri River from Three Forks, Montana, to St. Louis, Missouri, is referred to as the Missouri River Basin. Watersheds can be divided into smaller watersheds such as an area surrounding a small creek or stream.



What are some examples of watersheds?

The 61-mile stretch of Shoal Creek running from Barry County through Newton County into Jasper County and the land that drains into it is referred to as the Shoal Creek watershed. The headwaters of Flat Creek start in northern Benton County and southwestern Pettis County and carry water through a portion of Cooper County before running into the Lamine River. Flat Creek and all of the land draining into it is the Flat Creek watershed.

Why is my watershed important?

Watersheds provide water for drinking, irrigation and industrial processes. Many people also enjoy and use lakes and streams for their beauty, boating, fishing and swimming. Wildlife also need healthy watersheds for food and shelter.

What are some concerns about my watershed?

Water quality is a major concern in a watershed. Water quality problems can result from a wide variety of activities. Pollution can occur from factories, wastewater treatment plants or large confined animal feeding operations that discharge into a waterway. These types of point source pollutants are often traced back to a specific point of discharge. Nonpoint source pollution, however, is a major type of pollution that can be difficult to identify and measure. Nonpoint source pollutants are in the water that runs off crop or forest land. Other nonpoint sources include failing septic systems, parking lots, construction sites, irrigation systems and drainage systems. It can even result from automobile exhaust getting into the atmosphere and falling back to the earth in rain.

Who is responsible for my watershed?

Point sources are regulated under the Clean Water Act and are usually subject to permit requirements that focus on water quality protection. Nonpoint source pollution typically is

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unregulated and can be addressed by citizens, farmers and educators on a volunteer basis. The responsible parties may include citizens, industries, agribusinesses, commercial businesses or homeowners.

How can I protect my watershed?

Get to know your watershed. By becoming familiar with the activities in your watershed, you can better understand pollution problems that need specific attention. Implement best management practices where possible. If you are a farmer, maintain filter strips on the edges of your fields, terrace you row crops, mix your chemicals away from the well, and do soil testing and pest scouting so that fertilizer and pesticide applications can be more accurate. Provide water for your livestock and fence the pastures to keep livestock from damaging nearby streams and creeks. Keep your automobile maintained to reduce the amount of oil, grease and other lubricants leaking onto roads and driveways. Dispose of used oil and household chemicals properly. Join a volunteer water quality monitoring team.

For more information on volunteer monitoring, watersheds or nonpoint source pollution send written inquires to:

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Technical Assistance Program
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Or call (800) 361-4827
or fax (573) 526-5808.